

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Fellow Workers and Final Greetings

Colossians 4:7–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The closing greetings may look like a passage to skim, but the teacher should mine its riches, for it paints one of the most concrete pictures of the church in the New Testament. The doctrinal substance lies in several threads woven through the names. First, the church is a body of many members, a fellowship of real, named people who carry one another and the gospel together; the Christian life is never solitary. Second, the kingdom is again named as a present reality (Paul speaks of these as fellow workers for the kingdom of God, v. 11), and ordinary members have real ministries to fulfill (the word to Archippus, v. 17). Third, the apostolic letters were received and circulated as authoritative Scripture, read aloud in the gathered churches and exchanged among them (v. 16), which undergirds our reliance today on the completed written word and our rejection of claims to new revelation or continuing apostleship. Fourth, the passage showcases the gospel's power to transform and restore: Onesimus the runaway slave is now a beloved brother, and Mark, who once failed, is restored and useful, while the sober note about Demas (known from 2 Timothy 4:10) reminds us the walk must be continued.

The teacher should especially lift up the high value God places on the faithful service of ordinary members. The letter that began with the supremacy of Christ over the cosmos ends with named believers serving in homes and cities, couriers and physicians and pray-ers and hosts of house churches. This dignifies the unseen, faithful work of every member and presses the question Paul put to Archippus onto every student: are you fulfilling the ministry you have received in the Lord?

The formational aim is twofold, fitting the close of the study. First, to send students out as faithful, named servants who know they belong to the body, carry one another in prayer, and have a real ministry to fulfill. Second, to gather up the whole journey through Colossians, so that the towering truths about Christ come down to earth in changed, serving lives. Aim the lesson there. Send students home conscious of their place in the church, resolved to take up their ministry, quick to restore the fallen, devoted to the word, and formed, through this whole study, a little more into the image of the supreme and sufficient Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul commends Tychicus as a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant, and sends Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, now one of you (vv. 7–9). What do these descriptions reveal about how the gospel spreads and about the kind of people God uses, and what is striking

about Onesimus, a runaway slave, being called a faithful and beloved brother (compare the letter to Philemon)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul introduces Tychicus and Onesimus, the two who will carry the letter to Colossae. Tychicus is described in warm, weighty terms: a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow servant in the Lord. He is the trusted courier who will also report on Paul's circumstances and encourage their hearts. Note the dignity Paul gives to this work of faithful, behind-the-scenes service.

Then comes Onesimus, called a faithful and beloved brother, one of you. Help students feel the weight of this. As the letter to Philemon reveals, Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his Colossian master, Philemon, and somewhere along the way had met Christ through Paul. Now he returns, not merely as a returning runaway but as a beloved brother, one of them, a fellow member of the body. The gospel has utterly rewritten his story and his standing.

Draw out the two truths here. First, the gospel spreads through faithful, ordinary people, couriers, servants, brothers, not only through famous apostles. Second, the gospel transforms broken stories. Onesimus the disgraced runaway becomes Onesimus the beloved brother. No one is beyond the reach of grace, and grace does not merely forgive; it restores and dignifies.

This sets a tone for the whole passage: the church is a fellowship of real people, many of them with complicated histories, now bound together and useful in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dignity of faithful, behind-the-scenes service (Tychicus)
- The gospel spreading through ordinary faithful people, not only apostles
- Onesimus the runaway slave transformed into a beloved brother (see Philemon)
- Grace that not only forgives but restores and dignifies a broken story

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul's description of Tychicus tell us about the value of faithful service?
- What is striking about Onesimus being called a faithful and beloved brother?
- What does Onesimus teach us about what the gospel can do with a broken past?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul honors the quiet faithfulness of dependable servants like Tychicus. Would the people who depend on you describe you as faithful and dependable in the work God has given you? Where are you tempted toward unreliability, and what would greater faithfulness look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the quiet faithfulness of Tychicus and turns it on the student. Paul repeatedly commends people as faithful. Faithfulness, dependability in the work God has given, is one of the most prized and least glamorous virtues in the kingdom; it is what God looks for in a servant (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Help students assess honestly whether those who depend on them, family, church, employer, fellow workers, would describe them as faithful and dependable. We often want to be entrusted with significant work while being careless with small commitments, yet faithfulness is proven precisely in the small and the unseen.

Then identify the specific temptation toward unreliability: half-finished commitments, promises not kept, follow-through that fizzles, showing up only when convenient. Encourage one concrete step toward greater faithfulness this week, completing a neglected commitment, keeping a small promise, becoming someone others can count on in the work God has given.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness as a prized, unglamorous kingdom virtue (1 Corinthians 4:2)
- Dependability proven in small and unseen commitments
- Identifying the specific temptation toward unreliability
- One concrete step toward greater faithfulness this week

Discussion Prompts

- Would those who depend on you describe you as faithful and dependable?
- Where are you most tempted toward unreliability?
- What would greater faithfulness in your God-given work look like this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul includes Mark among his fellow workers (v. 10), the same Mark who had earlier abandoned a mission and caused a sharp split between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–39). What does Mark's presence here teach us about restoration and second chances in the kingdom of God, and how does it encourage those who have failed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Among Paul's fellow workers is Mark (also called John Mark). Help students recall his history. Years earlier, Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas partway through a mission, and the disagreement over whether to take him again was so sharp that it split Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–39). Yet here Mark is, restored, commended, and useful again, and Paul even instructs the churches to welcome him. By the end of Paul's life he calls Mark useful to me for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

This is a beautiful picture of restoration and second chances in the kingdom of God. A man who failed badly was not written off forever. He was restored, and he became so useful that tradition credits him with writing the Gospel of Mark. Failure need not be final for those who are willing to be restored.

Set this beside the sober note that the same passage greets Demas warmly, yet we later learn that Demas, in love with this present world, deserted Paul (2 Timothy 4:10). The two men together teach a balanced truth: those who have failed can be restored (Mark), and those who appear to be standing must take heed lest they fall (Demas). The Christian walk must be continued.

Apply it pastorally. Mark's restoration is enormous encouragement to anyone weighed down by past failure. The church should be a place where the fallen are restored, not branded, and where no one is reduced to their worst moment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mark's earlier failure and the split it caused (Acts 15:36–39)
- Restoration and second chances in the kingdom (2 Timothy 4:11)
- Failure need not be final for those willing to be restored
- The contrast with Demas, who later deserted Paul (2 Timothy 4:10): the walk must be continued

Discussion Prompts

- What does Mark's restoration teach us about second chances in the kingdom?
- How does Mark's story encourage someone weighed down by past failure?
- What do Mark and Demas together teach about the need to continue faithfully?

Question 4

Student Question:

Mark was restored after failing, while elsewhere we learn that Demas, named warmly here, later deserted Paul out of love for the world (2 Timothy 4:10). Is there someone who failed you or the church whom you have quietly written off? And where do you yourself most need either restoration or the resolve to keep from drifting away?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses the themes of restoration and perseverance in two directions. First, toward others: is there someone who failed us or the church whom we have quietly written off? Mark's story rebukes the impulse to reduce a person to their worst moment. The church is meant to restore the fallen, and we are called to extend the second chances we ourselves have received.

Help students name one such person honestly, and consider what a step toward restoration, or at least toward releasing the grudge, might look like. This is not naive; restoration involves wisdom and sometimes repentance and rebuilt trust. But the heart that writes people off permanently has forgotten how it was treated by grace.

Second, turn the question inward, toward Demas's warning. Where does the student most need either restoration (if they have drifted or fallen) or the resolve to keep from drifting (if they feel the pull of the present world)? Encourage honest self-examination and one concrete step, whether toward being restored or toward guarding against a slow drift away.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Refusing to write people off, in light of the restoration we have received
- Restoration involving wisdom, repentance, and rebuilt trust, not naivety
- Honest self-examination: do we need restoration or resolve against drift?
- A concrete step toward restoring another or guarding our own walk

Discussion Prompts

- Is there someone who failed you or the church whom you have written off?
- What would a step toward restoring that relationship look like?
- Where do you most need restoration yourself, or resolve to keep from drifting?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says Epaphras is always struggling, or wrestling, on the Colossians' behalf in his prayers, that they may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God (vv. 12–13). What does it tell us that Epaphras labored this hard in prayer for others, and what does it mean to pray for someone's maturity and assurance rather than just their comfort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives a moving portrait of Epaphras, the man who first brought the gospel to Colossae (1:7). He is always struggling, or wrestling, on their behalf in his prayers, that they may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God (vv. 12–13). The word translated struggling is the language of strenuous effort, even agony; Epaphras labored in prayer.

Help students see that intercessory prayer is real work. Epaphras did not pray casually for the Colossians; he wrestled for them. This dignifies the hidden ministry of prayer and rebukes the casual, drowsy praying most of us settle for. Some of the most important work done for the church is done by people on their knees whom no one sees.

Note especially what Epaphras prayed for: not mainly their comfort or circumstances, but that they would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. He prayed for their spiritual

growth and stability. This is a higher and rarer kind of intercession. Most of our prayers for others concern health, jobs, and relief; Epaphras shows us how to pray for people's souls.

Apply it: to love people well is to labor in prayer for their maturity and assurance, not only their ease. This is how Paul prayed (1:9–12) and how Epaphras prayed, and it is a pattern for how we should carry one another before God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Intercessory prayer as real, strenuous work (Epaphras wrestling)
- The hidden, vital ministry of prayer for the church
- Praying for others' maturity and assurance, not mainly their comfort
- Loving people by laboring in prayer for their souls (compare 1:9–12)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Epaphras wrestled in prayer for the Colossians?
- How is praying for someone's maturity different from praying for their comfort?
- What does Epaphras teach us about the hidden ministry of prayer?

Question 6

Student Question:

Epaphras wrestled in prayer for the spiritual maturity of people he loved. Who are the people God has given you to carry in prayer this way? Are you praying mainly for their comfort and circumstances, or also, like Epaphras, that they would stand mature and fully assured in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes Epaphras's wrestling prayer and asks whom the student is carrying this way. Help students identify the specific people God has given them to pray for, family, fellow members, friends, those they have led to Christ or are trying to reach.

Then press the quality of those prayers. Are they mostly about comfort and circumstances (which are not wrong to pray for), or do they also reach for the deeper things Epaphras sought, that these people would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God? It is easy to pray for someone's surgery and never pray for their soul.

Encourage one concrete change: choosing one or two people and beginning to wrestle in prayer for their spiritual maturity and assurance, not just their ease. This is both a gift to them and a means by which our own love for them deepens. Suggest students name those people now and commit to praying for their growth this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the people God has given us to carry in prayer
- Examining whether we pray for souls or only for circumstances
- Wrestling for others' maturity and assurance as a deeper love
- Choosing specific people and committing to pray for their growth

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the people God has given you to carry in prayer?
- Do you pray mainly for their comfort, or also for their maturity in Christ?
- Whom could you begin wrestling in prayer for this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul directs that this letter be read aloud in the church, exchanged with the church at Laodicea, and read there too (v. 16). What does this practice tell us about how the apostolic letters were received and circulated as authoritative Scripture, and why does it matter that the church today still stands on this same completed, written word rather than looking for new revelations (compare 2 Timothy 3:16–17)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In verse 16 Paul gives instructions about the letter itself: when it has been read among them, it is also to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and they are to read the letter coming from Laodicea. This brief note opens a window onto how the apostolic writings functioned in the early church.

Help students see several things. First, the letter was read aloud in the gathered assembly. Most believers could not own a personal copy; the word came to them as it was read in the church. Second, the letters were circulated and exchanged among congregations, treated as having authority not just for the original recipients but for the wider church. Third, this is how the writings that became our New Testament were received from the beginning, as the authoritative apostolic word for all the churches.

Draw the doctrinal point for today. The church now stands on this completed, written word. The same apostolic message, inspired by God, is preserved for us in the New Testament, which is profitable and sufficient to equip us fully (2 Timothy 3:16–17). We do not need, and should not seek, new revelations, continuing apostles, or fresh prophetic words beyond what God has given. The faith was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and our task is to receive, read, and obey the word we have, not to wait for more.

Apply it with reverence. The reading of Scripture in the assembly is not a preliminary to the real event; it is the voice of God to His gathered people. This shapes how we ought to listen when the word is read and taught.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The apostolic letters read aloud in the gathered assembly
- The letters circulated and received as authoritative Scripture for the wider church
- The church today standing on the completed, sufficient written word (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- No need for new revelation, continuing apostleship, or fresh prophetic words (Jude 3)

Discussion Prompts

- What does this verse show about how the apostolic letters were received and used?
- Why does it matter that the church stands on a completed, written word?
- How should we listen when Scripture is read aloud in the assembly?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul expected the word to be read and heard among the gathered church. How do you regard the public reading and teaching of Scripture in the assembly, and your own time in the word during the week? Where might you give the word of Christ a more central and attentive place in your life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the centrality of the word into the student's own life and worship. Paul expected the word to be read and heard among the gathered church; the question asks how the student regards both the public reading and teaching of Scripture and their own time in the word.

Help students examine their posture in the assembly. Do they listen to the reading and teaching of Scripture as the voice of God, with attentiveness and expectancy, or as a routine to be endured before the parts they prefer? A high view of the word shows up in how we listen.

Then turn to personal intake. Recall from Lesson 6 that the word is meant to dwell in us richly. Where might the student give the word a more central and attentive place, a regular time of reading, more careful attention in worship, memorizing a passage, letting Scripture shape their thinking through the week? Encourage one concrete step to give the word of Christ a more central place this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Listening to the read and taught word as the voice of God
- Examining our posture toward Scripture in the assembly
- Personal intake of the word dwelling in us richly (Colossians 3:16)
- One concrete step to give the word a more central place

Discussion Prompts

- How do you regard the public reading and teaching of Scripture in worship?
- How central is the word in your life during the week?
- What is one step to give the word of Christ a more central place?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul sends a pointed personal word: say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord (v. 17), and the whole passage is full of named workers and even a church meeting in Nympha's house. What does this teach about the church as a body in which every member has a God-given ministry to fulfill, and about the high value God places on the faithful service of ordinary members in the local congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gathers the deepest theme running through the closing greetings and gives it the weight it deserves. Paul sends a pointed word to one member: say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord (v. 17). And the whole passage is crowded with named workers, a courier, a physician, a praying founder, fellow prisoners, and a church meeting in Nympha's house. Together they teach a rich doctrine of the church.

Begin with the church as a body of many members. The letter that opened with Christ as the head of the body (1:18) closes by showing the body in action: many members, each with a part to play, knit together across households and cities. The Christian life is corporate, not solitary. We belong to one another, we serve one another, and the gospel advances through the coordinated faithfulness of ordinary members (compare Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Now draw out the word to Archippus. We do not know exactly what ministry Archippus had received, but the principle is unmistakable: he had a God-given work, and he needed to see that he fulfilled it. Every member has received a ministry in the Lord, some service, some part in the body's life and mission, and the danger is leaving it unfulfilled, half-done, or neglected. Paul thought it worth a personal, public charge to make sure Archippus completed his.

Highlight the high value God places on the faithful service of ordinary members in the local congregation. The famous apostle does not hold the only ministry that matters. So does the courier, the host of the house church, the man on his knees, the physician, the restored failure. A healthy congregation is not a few professionals served by a passive crowd; it is a body in which every member takes up the ministry they have received. This is the New Testament pattern of the local church, with its members serving according to the gifts and callings God has given.

Bring it home with Paul's question to Archippus made personal. Each student has received a ministry in the Lord, whether teaching, serving, encouraging, hosting, praying, giving, showing mercy, or some other work. The question Paul put to Archippus is the question for every member: are you fulfilling the ministry you have received? Help students see that the towering Christ of chapter 1 is honored not only in grand confessions but in ordinary members faithfully taking up their God-given work in His church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as one body of many members, each with a part to play (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
- The Christian life as corporate, not solitary; the body shown in action
- Every member having received a ministry in the Lord to fulfill (the word to Archippus)
- The danger of an unfulfilled or neglected ministry
- The high value God places on the faithful service of ordinary members in the local congregation
- A healthy congregation as a serving body, not professionals served by a passive crowd

Discussion Prompts

- What does the word to Archippus teach about every member's ministry?
- Why is the church meant to be a serving body rather than a passive audience?
- What ministry have you received in the Lord, and are you fulfilling it?

Question 10

Student Question:

As we close the book of Colossians, look back across this passage, and across the whole letter. Paul has lifted Christ to the highest place, grounded us in Him, and now sends us out to serve Him with named, ordinary faithfulness. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Colossians 4:7-18, or from this study as a whole, that you most need to carry forward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone closes both the lesson and the study. It gathers the passage, named, ordinary believers serving Christ and one another, and invites students to look back across the whole letter. The student's task is to name one specific way Christ is forming them, through this passage or through the study as a whole.

Walk back through the journey of Colossians as a prompt. Paul lifted Christ to the highest place (the image of God, Creator, sustainer, head of the church, the one in whom all the fullness of deity dwells). He grounded us in Christ (reconciled, complete, buried and raised with Him, free from law and from human rules). He called us to live the new life (minds set above, the old self

off and the new self on, love and forgiveness, homes and work under His lordship, prayer and gracious witness). And he ended with the fellowship of named servants. Any of these may be the truth a given student most needs to carry forward.

Close the whole study by reminding students that the aim was never information about Colossians but transformation into the likeness of the Christ it exalts. Invite each to name the single truth from this last passage, or from the whole study, that they most need, and to commit it to memory and to practice. The goal is that, having beheld the supreme and sufficient Christ for thirteen lessons, they would walk out a little more rooted in Him, a little more like Him, and faithfully fulfilling the ministry they have received in the Lord. Consider closing the session in prayer, perhaps praying Epaphras's prayer over the class: that they would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gathering the whole journey through Colossians: the supremacy of Christ, our completeness in Him, the new life, and the serving body
- Transformation into the likeness of Christ, not mere information, as the aim of the whole study
- Carrying one specific truth forward from the passage or the study
- Walking out rooted in Christ and fulfilling the ministry received in the Lord

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage, or from the whole study, do you most need to carry forward?
- How has Christ been forming you over these thirteen lessons?
- What ministry will you commit to fulfilling, and how can this group support you?